

## Activity: 7-1-7 and outbreaks in the news

### Scenario set: Disease X

#### Instructions

- On your own, **read** through the following news article(s).
- In your group, **discuss** applying the 7-1-7 approach to the situation described in the article.
  - How could using 7-1-7 in real-time have been helpful in the early phase of this outbreak response?
  - At which government level(s) might 7-1-7 be useful to apply for this outbreak (e.g. national level, subnational, multiple subnational areas) and why?
  - How could 7-1-7 findings from this outbreak be used to inform actions + planning?
- Use your imagination and/or experience to answer if the article does not have enough information.
- In plenary, briefly **summarize** the article and your discussion.

#### News Article

##### Health officials grapple with deadly mystery ‘Disease X’ in Congo

The Washington Post | By Vivian Ho | 6 December 2024

*A mysterious, flu-like disease has killed dozens in the southwest region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with women and children among the most affected, health officials said Thursday. At least 376 cases have been reported since Oct. 24 of individuals experiencing fevers, headaches and runny noses, in addition to difficulty breathing and anemia, Jean Kaseya, director general of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in the agency’s weekly briefing.*

*Health officials have begun referring to the mysterious illness as “Disease X.” Africa CDC has recorded a total of 79 deaths caused by the illness, while local officials told Reuters that 143 have died. The numbers differ because the case definition is still unclear and some cases are still being confirmed, Margaret Muigai Edwin, communications director for Africa CDC, said in an email to The Washington Post.*

*The disease emerged in the Panzi health zone, Kaseya said, a remote, rural part of Kwango province along the border of Angola. The most affected age group is children under 5, with 198 cases reported — more than half of total cases.*

*Malnutrition, from which 40 percent of the region suffers, may have played a role in making infected individuals more vulnerable to the disease, said Dieudonné Mwamba, director general of Congo’s National Public Health Institute, at the briefing.*

*A breakdown in communication may have also contributed to the spread, Kaseya said. The first case was reported on Oct. 24, but it wasn’t until Sunday that authorities notified the national government. “That means we had a delay of almost five to six weeks,” Kaseya said. “In five to six weeks, so many things can happen.”*

*A team of epidemiologists, lab experts and infection prevention and control workers from Africa CDC are now in the Kwango province hoping to identify the disease, Kaseya said. Officials are urging people to remain calm and vigilant and to prevent the spread of the disease by engaging in good hygiene practices and reporting any suspected cases to health officials, and to avoid mass gatherings and handling a deceased person’s remains.*

*The World Health Organization will be sending medical professionals and supplies to aid in treatment of the disease, as well as in its identification, the organization said in a statement provided to The Washington Post. WHO officials cautioned against calling the disease “unidentified,” advising instead to describe it as “undiagnosed,” noting that the remote nature of the region — as well as its lack of laboratory services — may mean that what is infecting people may be an existing pathogen. Conflict, as well as the ongoing rainy season, has made it difficult to access the area, according to WHO.*

*Medical professionals will also be testing for flu — it is peak flu season in the region, WHO said — as well as coronavirus, malaria and measles, in case the unknown disease may be multiple known diseases affecting the area.*

*Disease X is hitting the Democratic Republic of Congo as the country struggles to get a handle on an upsurge of mpox, with nearly 48,000 cases and 1,200 deaths reported, according to Africa CDC. Mpox, an infectious, flu-like disease that can cause a painful rash, has spread to 20 different countries since January, the Africa CDC said.*

The original article can be accessed at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/06/congo-mystery-flu-disease-x-illness/>